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DE RUEHWN #0006/01 0051922
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6986
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0128
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRIDGETOWN 000006

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/19/2018
TAGS: [ETRD](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [XL](#) [ZL](#)
SUBJECT: CUBA, HUMAN RIGHTS, SECURITY COOPERATION AND
HEALTH ON DECK AS THE AMBASSADOR PAYS FAREWELL CALL ON
BARBADOS PM THOMPSON

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Mary M. Ourisman Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C). During a December 19 farewell call on Barbados Prime Minister David Thompson, the Ambassador thanked Thompson for his efforts to work with us to strengthen regional security, urged him to reassess his government's approach to UN human rights resolutions, and reaffirmed U.S. support for combating HIV/AIDS in the region. PM Thompson highlighted his government's solidarity with Cuba and expressed hope that the U.S. would end its economic embargo. He reiterated his concern about Barbados financial services sector falling into the crosshairs of potential changes in US laws restricting overseas financial activity. The PM also affirmed that his government would welcome additional security support and continued training assistance. End Summary

Bilateral Relationship on Positive Trajectory

¶2. (C) During a December 19 farewell call on Prime Minister Thompson, the Ambassador expressed her gratitude for the close cooperation she had enjoyed with the Government of Barbados and from the Prime Minister during her tenure. PM Thompson thanked the Ambassador for her service to Barbados, saying he was confident about the positive direction of his country's relationship with the U.S. Thompson expressed hope that Barbados could increase dialogue with the new Administration and the Congress. Referring to meetings in Colorado during the Democratic National Convention, the PM noted that several Congressmen had told him the region only comes to them when it has a problem. Congressman Rangel had urged Thompson and his regional counterparts to build long-term relationships with the Members of Congress and key committee staffers, the PM said.

Shared Focus on Regional Security

¶3. (C) Recalling the Secretary's September launch of a Caribbean Security Dialogue and meetings Thompson hosted in March with Assistant Secretary Shannon and SOUTHCOM Commander Admiral Stavridis, the Ambassador emphasized the continuing U.S. interest in working with the region to strengthen security cooperation and drug interdiction capabilities. The PM agreed on the importance of keeping the dialogue on track, despite the cancellation of the December meeting. (We subsequently learned that Thompson has written his CARICOM

colleagues conveying his regret that the meeting was cancelled and urging priority attention to the security dialogue in the New Year. The Ambassador also urged Thompson to think about Caribbean-specific priorities that might be a focus for the April Summit of the Americas in Trinidad, noting that the first ever Summit hosted in the Caribbean offered the region an opportunity to call attention to its priorities. The PM said he is looking forward to the summit and to active participation by Caribbean leaders. Thompson also observed that regional mechanisms such as the Regional Security System (RSS) have served the region well, but pointed out that funding is a concern going forward, particularly in the current global economic environment. He added that only three of the Eastern Caribbean countries have functioning coast guards, and the others are not likely to be able to upgrade their capabilities in the medium term due to the lack of resources.

14. (C) The Ambassador praised Barbados for making the most of the many training opportunities the U.S. provided countries in the region. She noted that the USS Swift -- a Navy training platform -- will be making lengthy port calls in Barbados in January and March, offering an extensive menu of training modules. She encouraged the Prime Minister to ensure Barbados took full advantage of the offerings. Thompson responded that Barbados recognized the importance of training for military and government personnel and said he would welcome increased training, particularly for junior military officers. He reiterated that the region as a whole lacks the necessary training capacity to meet its security needs, and the U.S. role in providing security and law enforcement training remained critical to the region's security.

Addressing Human Rights in the UN

15. (C) The Ambassador encouraged the Prime Minister to reconsider his government's approach on human rights resolutions in the United Nations. Barbados has consistently voted against or abstained from voting on resolutions concerning human rights in Iran and Burma, she noted, and we would hope that Barbados would stand up for the freedoms of others in international fora the way it stands up for such freedoms at home. Thompson said he understood that there is dissonance over how to approach the issue of UN human rights resolutions, but maintained Barbados sees things from a slightly different perspective than the U.S. Given our shared heritage of respect for human rights and democracy, the DCM observed, our countries should be on the same page on these issues. The Ambassador also took the opportunity to urge Barbados to recognize Kosovo as 53 other nations have already done.

Thompson Defends Cuba

16. (c) With his Foreign Minister fresh from the Bahia Summit in Brazil, PM Thompson then turned the conversation to Cuba, emphasizing that CARICOM would like to see the U.S. end its embargo. He said that he and his colleagues were hopeful that the new administration will take a different approach with Cuba. Barbados, as one of the first countries in the English Caribbean to recognize Cuba, will do whatever it can to facilitate a rapprochement between the U.S. and Cuba, Thompson added. After his recent visit to Havana, he noted, it was his sense that there is genuine desire to regularize relations with the U.S. (Note: Thompson was in Cuba on December 8, 2008 attending the CARICOM-Cuba Summit. End note.) The Ambassador reassured the PM that the United States stands ready to regularize relations with Cuba, but pointed out that there has to be real, sustained democratic change in that country for that to take place.

Releasing political prisoners, she noted, would be a clear gesture of the regime,s sincerity. This is an area where the other nations of the Caribbean could be particularly helpful, the DCM explained. If they sincerely hoped to see a rapprochement, encouraging the Cubans to do the right thing on political prisoners would be the best way to promote movement in that direction. The Ambassador emphasized that the United States would like to see genuine political and economic reforms in Cuba so that the Cuban people can enjoy the same freedoms and prosperity that Barbadians enjoy.

Praise for HIV/AIDS Work

17. (C) The Ambassador reaffirmed United States, support for efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and explained that the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program would soon include a first-ever regional program, which would be supported in part from our Embassy in Barbados. The Ambassador praised Barbados for the seriousness with which the government and the ministers have embraced this issue. In particular, she and made it a priority and congratulated the PM on the outstanding work done by the health authorities in Barbados in combating the spread of HIV, noting that recent public efforts to combat discrimination against victims of the disease were commendable.

Tax Haven Legislation Concerns

18. (C) As he has in other venues, PM Thompson raised his government,s concern about tax issues arising from the "Stop Tax Haven Abuse" legislation that had been launched during the last Congress. The bill, he noted, lists Barbados and several OECS countries as tax havens -- a moniker Barbados believes to be inaccurate, given the strict regulation of, and transparency in, its banking sector. The offshore financial sector is critical to the Barbadian economy, Thompson emphasized, and his Government was very concerned that the bill could lead to job losses in the midst of the ongoing economic crisis,which was already proving to be a drag on tourism.

Comment

19. (C) Thompson was warm and engaging in this final call, and was clearly appreciative of the Ambassador,s efforts during her tenure to forge a stronger relationship, including her role in coordinating his White House meeting with the President and his meetings with A/S Shannon and Admiral Stavridis. Barbados greatly appreciates such high-level contacts and the sense of being consulted that they provide. Thompson can be expected to be one of our key allies in advancing our security dialogue with the region, as he was personally concerned that the December meeting had been cancelled by CARICOM with little regional consultation. The PM,s focus on Cuba, we later learned, was intended for public consumption, as he had the Government Information Service widely publicize his comments in favor of ending the embargo. The expectation in Barbados, as in much of the region, is that changing the relationship with Cuba involves only U.S. action, with nothing required of Cuba. We tried to encourage Thompson to recognize that Cuban actions, such as releasing political prisoners as a first step, would be essential.
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